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# The Clown Within: Becoming White and Mapuche Ritual Clowns

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Everything deep loves a mask

——Friedrich Nietzsche

The last time I saw Alfredo was in the orchard behind his mother's house. White apple blossoms stuck to his black hair, and tears cut white streaks through the dirt on his face. A blue nylon rope bit taut around his neck, and his feet brushed the muddy ground as they swung. A crowd of people slowly gathered and stared. Luís turned away, muttering, "This is what becomes of clowns." For, according to the rural Mapuche people with whom I lived, behind the hilarity, joy, and chaos of their ritual actions, the lot of the clown, *koyong*, is not a happy one. Within each clown lies his inevitable downfall. Abject poverty, illness, alcoholism, and depression are his constant companions, and an untimely death his usual fate.

In this paper, I want to explore the lives of these clowns in both ritual and everyday contexts. In particular, I want to focus on their close symbolic association with white people, and thereby to take clowning as a kind of "reverse anthropology" of Mapuche people's relation with the Chilean white majority (see Wagner 1981; Kirsch 2006). I want to suggest that taking seriously the implications of this reverse anthropology constituted by clowning should

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lead anthropologists working in the context of indigenous South America and elsewhere to be cautious in their growing tendency to attribute “agency” to every facet of life, and to ensure that conceptual space remains for indigenous discourses of failure and loss. I will show here that clowns are in part a means by which many rural Mapuche people come to understand precisely their own *lack* of agency, their own failure, and their constitutive role in the white Other who dominates them. As ridiculous, laughable, and tragic as clowns might be, the transformative capacity whose consequences they exemplify is common to all: everybody has their clown within.

The masks of Mapuche clowns are a familiar sight in markets and tourist shops throughout the Mapuche heartland of southern Chile’s Novena Región. Indeed, *koyong* masks have become one of the iconic images of Mapuche culture and identity, utilized in contexts as diverse as political graffiti, tourist brochures, and government blueprints for indigenous development. Yet this ubiquity of *koyong* masks obscures the fact that the nature of *koyong* clowns themselves is little understood, even in the communities in which they live. The gradual abandonment of ritual activities in many Mapuche communities has resulted in a subsequent disappearance of *koyong* in many areas, and even where *koyong* do continue to play an important part in ritual activity there is little exegetical commentary on their activities, either by other ritual participants or by the clowns themselves. However, one thing at least seems clear: certain clowns refer to white people, *winka*, and are referred to as such—*winka koyong*, or “white people clowns.” Their masks are lightened to portray white skin, they sport long hair and moustaches of a kind never worn by Mapuche men, they ride hobby horses equipped with silver tack of a Spanish style, and their behavior, too, mirrors that of stereotypical white people.

The association of clowns with white people would at first glance seem to be yet another example of a fascination with the Other, which is so foundational to contemporary understandings of indigenous South American sociality. This fascination with the Other within myth (Lévi-Strauss 1993; Hugh-Jones 1988; 1989; Gow 2001; Roe 1988), kinship (Gow 1991; Vilaça 2005; Viveiros de Castro 2001), and cosmology (Fausto 2001; Viveiros de Castro 1991; 1998) highlights what has been termed a “symbolic economy of alterity” (Viveiros de Castro 1996: 189).<sup>1</sup> Such an economy of alterity often reaches its zenith in the figure of white people, and there has consequently been a great deal of anthropological interest in the way indigenous peoples have conceptualized and engaged with “whiteness” (Albert and Ramos 2000; Canessa 2012;

<sup>1</sup> Viveiros de Castro defines this as “processes of symbolic exchange that cross sociopolitical, cosmological, and ontological boundaries, thereby playing a constitutive role in the definition of collective identities” (1996: 190).

Vilaça 2006; Weismantel 2001).<sup>2</sup> From the adoption of Western clothing (Ewart 2007; Gow 2007a; Santos Granero 2009), to forms of engagement with Christianity (Gow 2006; Vilaça 1997; Vilaça and Wright 2009), to changing forms of political action (Conklin 1997; Oakdale 2004), anthropologists have overturned assumptions about phenomena previously understood solely in terms of acculturation or assimilation, demonstrating instead the agency of indigenous peoples in engaging positively with white Others. And there certainly are many aspects of Mapuche life which revolve around an attempt to engage positively in alterity, to create the Self through the incorporation of the Other. As I have argued at length elsewhere (2011), Mapuche personhood is conceptualized as a continual process of centrifugal self-creation.<sup>3</sup> People become *che*, or “true persons,” through a lifetime of establishing exchange relationships with non-consanguineal others. And white people do in certain contexts stand as Others par excellence. Historically, Mapuche leaders at the zenith of Mapuche power in the mid-nineteenth century would be buried in the full dress uniform of the Chilean or Argentine military, and send their eldest sons to study in Santiago or Buenos Aires (Foerster and Menard 2009). Mapuche shamans, *machi*, strive to incorporate symbols of the potency of white people into their healing (Bacigalupo 2007). And today, although a century of colonial oppression has reduced the glamour of white people, the ability to function in *winka* society and form relations with *winka* remains undeniably a key source of social value.

However, it is my contention in this essay that to interpret Mapuche ritual clowns simply as yet another example of an indigenous fascination with the Other, as a positive mimetic cooption of the potency of white Others (see Taussig 1993), is to miss everything that is important about them, to overlook all that clowns can tell us about the ongoing tragedies of contemporary Mapuche life, of which Alfredo’s death was but one small and quickly forgotten example. I have come to understand *koyong* as not so much about the positive incorporation of the Other into the Self, but rather as the instantiation of the moment when it ceases to make sense to speak of the relationship between Mapuche and *winka* in terms of Self and Other, which instead become visible as converging points on a continuum of transformation, a transformation also visible in the shifts in identity wrought by the forced urban migration of many Mapuche people. *Koyong* clowns are no longer simply representations

<sup>2</sup> This indigenous interest with whiteness should not be confused with state ideologies of “*blancamiento*” and “*mestizaje*” (Canessa 2006; 2012; de la Cadena 2000; Wade 1997; Wright 1993). This is not to deny that state and indigenous ideologies of becoming white intersect in highly complex ways, but rather to say that they remain distinct phenomena rooted in distinct ontologies.

<sup>3</sup> The centrality of “otherness” to Mapuche ideas about social relations mirrors that described recently by Stasch for the Korowai, a work which itself makes explicit its debt to indigenous South American theories of alterity (2009).

of white people—they have also become instantiations of Mapuche people's transformative capacity to *become white*.

This internal capacity, common to all, is externalized, embodied, and marginalized in the figure of the clown in a manner reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's exploration of abjection (1982). For Kristeva, the abject is that part of the self that must be expelled and denigrated in order to retain the semblance of order and internal coherence. In the case of Mapuche clowns, the instability and moral ambiguity of this abjection is highlighted through, and emergent from, the fact that outside of ritual contexts, clowns, far from being too white, are precisely those people who are denigrated for being "too Mapuche" (*mapuchado*). While "true persons" embody the controlled balance of Self and Other, of Mapuche and white, clowns bring the two extremes of the continuum into a strange juxtaposition that bears a subsequent moral reading. As I will explain, this moral reading of the "becoming white" of clowns resonates with that which rural people give to the "becoming white" of Mapuche people forced to migrate to Chile's urban centers.

I begin by exploring the two primary ritual contexts in which clowns perform: the sport of *palin*, and the great *ngillatun* fertility ritual. The duality of ritual roles that clowns play in these two events, along with their association with white people, their abject poverty, and their insatiable bodily desires, are not features limited to Mapuche clowns, but rather constitute four features characteristic of ritual clowns throughout the Americas. Utilizing comparative material from both North America and South America, I suggest that, far from being coincidental, the co-occurrence of these four features of ludic roles is systematically linked to a single underlying, logical framework. However, I will employ ethnographic comparison to show that despite this singular framework the particular outcome of ludic possibilities is determined by the local form of the "symbolic economy of alterity" in which the group concerned is embedded (Viveiros de Castro 1996). Thus among societies like, for example, the Apache in North America or the Waiwai in South America, where the balanced engagement with Others appears firmly under control, such ludic figures serve to confirm superiority over the Other. Yet among groups like the Mapuche, for whom, as we will see, the carefully balanced engagement with difference is no longer possible, ludic roles become simultaneously a form of *self*-critique. My working hypothesis is that the different outcomes of the ludic engagement with others are indexed in the social status of the clowns themselves *outside* of the ritual context. So in societies such as the Apache and the Waiwai, where engagement with others is under control, ludic roles are occupied by people of relatively high status, while in societies like the Mapuche, in which many people feel that the controlled engagement with difference has collapsed, clowns are drawn from the most marginal and denigrated sections of society.

The perception among many rural Mapuche people that their control of any balanced engagement with alterity has collapsed has resulted not only

from military defeat and loss of territory, but also, and primarily, from the forced migration of almost an entire generation to Chile's urban centers. Rather than simply dismissing rural Mapuche people's reflections on identity as iterations of racist state ideologies or "false consciousness," I take seriously their assertion, simultaneously moral and ontological, that urban migrants have "become white."

I then return to the context of the rural south, the everyday lives of clowns themselves, and the moral evaluations to which they are subject. Through their lived embodiment of becoming white, clowns constitute a coming to terms with the process of transformation, which is not willed or desired but rather imposed by the exigencies of Mapuche people's precarious position at the margins of Chilean colonialism. Rather than marking out indigenous agency in the face of global pressures, *koyong* clowns, I argue, mark a creative response to the very absence of agency, to the perceived collapse of the controlled engagement with difference which ideally constitutes the heart of Mapuche life.

#### THE TWO FACES OF *KOYONG*

Mapuche people translate the term *koyong* into Spanish as *payaso*, meaning simply "clown." The masks worn by the clowns, made of either leather or wood, are also called *koyong*. *Koyong* masks take one of two forms: bull masks (*torü koyong*) or white people masks (*winka koyong*).<sup>4</sup> Only the latter is still in use around Lago Budi where I conducted my fieldwork.<sup>5</sup> Both leather and wood masks are first lightened by scraping their surface, after which horsehair is added to provide long, flowing hair and a drooping moustache. In addition to their distinctive masks, clowns dress in ragged, worn-out clothing, and they often increase their dishevelment by stuffing straw into tears in their clothes. By contrast to the abject poverty of their dress, *koyong* ride hobbyhorses (*kawell*) bedecked with bright "silver" tack made of cardboard covered in aluminum foil.

The sight of a *koyong*'s muddy, unshod feet sporting shining silver spurs presents a bizarre juxtaposition of utter poverty and immense wealth, and indeed these two phenomena—being barefoot and silver horse jewelry—are the primary idioms in Mapuche discourse for describing generalized states of poverty and wealth. The period of intense and abject poverty in the mid-twentieth century is referred to not so much in terms of hunger or illness, but as a time when people had no shoes. Wearing shoes, along with being able to speak Spanish, are local markers of having become "civilized" (*civilizado*). The zenith of Mapuche power in the mid- to late nineteenth century, when

<sup>4</sup> I do not attempt any analysis of the bull clowns here, but they may well be related to similar bull mask performances far to the north in the Andes (Harris 1999; Platt 1992).

<sup>5</sup> I carried out a total of twenty-eight months ethnographic fieldwork in Konoko Budi in the sector of Piedra Alta, in Chile's Novena Región, in 2000–2003, 2007, 2009, and 2010.

Mapuche control extended from the Pacific almost to the Atlantic, is spoken of as a time of silver, when women were adorned in so much of it that they literally could not walk. Men's silver was displayed on their horses in reigns, bridles, stirrups, and spurs. Therefore, a barefoot clown wearing silver spurs is not only hilarious but also meaningful in terms of the stark contrasts it evokes for Mapuche people. The last piece of the clown's outfit is his sword, usually a piece of bamboo wrapped in aluminum foil or a piece of wood cut roughly to shape. The physical appearance of *koyong* seems to be quite uniform across Mapuche territory and throughout the photographic record back to at least the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Yet while constant in their physical appearance, we will see that the behaviors and actions of *koyong* vary dramatically according to the contexts in which they appear.

All of the clowns I have known were drawn from the most marginal sections of rural Mapuche society, a society itself already marginal from the perspective of the Chilean state. Moreover, they have tended to be the most marginal people of those marginal sections—unmarried and frequently alcoholic men who are, as locals say, a bit “crazy” (*wedwed lonko*). One reason such men are sought out as clowns is that they will not have to be paid for ritual performances, and will act as clowns for alcohol alone. Beyond economic considerations, there is a sense in which clowns *must* be this kind of person. “No, no, a rich man could never be *koyong*,” my neighbor Sergio told me, “A clown will always be poor, he will always suffer.” While the poverty and marginalization of these men make them suitable to be asked to clown, their acceptance of the clowning role dooms them to remain poor and marginal. The causal links between clowning and misery remain implicit and indirect. Alfredo's suicide, for example, was explained by a number of competing theories ranging from witchcraft to romantic failure, yet it was his status as a clown that made his tragic end seem preordained.

I remain unclear as to what motivates such men to accept clowning and the tragedies it necessarily implies. Although all of the clowns with whom I spoke were happy to discuss the practicalities of their ritual activities, they were reticent regarding their motivations for accepting such a role. The closest I ever got to a response was when Ramón, a clown in his early fifties, stated simply in Spanish, “*Soy así, no más*—I'm just like that.” Men usually start clowning in their late teens and remain recognized as clowns until their deaths. Even men who have not acted as masked clowns in ritual contexts for many years are still referred to as *koyong*. In fact, a crucial aspect to understanding Mapuche

<sup>6</sup> Although *koyong* are mentioned in passing by Diego de Rosales (1989 [1674]: 144), the only detailed historical description comes from the chronicler González de Nájera who wrote in 1614 that “some come wearing bits of Spanish soldiers' uniforms, while others wear clothing of priests, clerics, or monks [...] some of these barbarians come to these games [*palin* ritual hockey] with masks made of the molded, dried skin of Spaniards' faces, placing great emphasis on their beards and moustaches” (1889 [1614]: 54).





IMAGE 1. "Kollones." Two Mapuche clowns in 1928. Photographer unknown. Photographic archives of the Musée du Quai Branly. Courtesy of Scala Archives/ Musée du Quai Branly.

clowns is that their identity is by no means restricted to their ritual performances. While *koyong* may use masks, these masks do not serve to successfully "frame" their wearers, in the sense intended by Bateson (1972), of bracketing off their clownish antics from their everyday personae. This means we cannot fully understand *koyong* from analyzing their ritual activities alone; a clown is not simply a role that a man performs, but rather something that he is, a permanent state of being, or perhaps more appropriately, of becoming, a point to which I shall return.

### *Koyong in Purrun Palin*

The primary ritual context in which clowns appear in the communities around Lago Budi is *purrun palin*, literally "dancing *palin*." *Palin* is a sport resembling



field hockey, and *purrun palin* is its most elaborately ritualized form (Course 2008; Nanculef 1993). In a spatially dispersed society that is organized more on the basis of individual autonomy than on membership of any preexisting group, *palin* is one of the few activities in which some kind of group membership is significant. *Palin* usually consists of a series of games between two *lof*, a unit that can be glossed roughly as an extended patrilineal kin group. The exchanges of hospitality between individual host and guest families are as central to *palin* as are the games themselves, and in addition to members of host and guest patri-groups, hospitality is also offered to *koye*, “uninvited guests” from other communities.

While standard *palin* consists of the elongated playing field surrounded by the cooking fires and tables of individual host families, the organization and layout of dancing *palin* is far more complex and also more dangerous. Dancing *palin* tend to only occur about once every decade due to the immense cost involved. Each family participating must slaughter at least one large animal, either a cow or a horse, and provide a great deal of wine. The heaviest cost, however, is the inevitable loss of life generated by the game’s outcome—the losing patri-group will always suffer at least one untimely death within a year. In the last dancing *palin* to be held in Piedra Alta, in 2000, at the very moment the winning goal was scored a patrilineal relative of the losing team, a migrant laborer working in Santiago, was hit by a car and, as my friend Raúl told me, “His skull shattered as if he’d been hit with a *wüño* [*palin* stick].”

Dancing *palin*, like many other ritual sports throughout the Americas, is literally a game of life and death, and it is no surprise that people do everything in their power to win. An entire sub-genre of witchcraft has evolved around the manipulation of *palin* results. This involves concealing the gall bladder of a large animal underneath the goal of ones own team to prevent goals being conceded. In addition to such illegitimate and morally reprehensible means of swaying the game’s result, each participating patri-group will also employ the legitimate mechanism of providing four *koyong* clowns and four *mütrüm palife* cheerleaders. These cheerleaders, literally “callers of the ball,” are young women who dance and chant along the sidelines for the duration of the match in order to cajole the ball itself towards the opponents’ goal. Each member of a team will take responsibility for finding either a cheerleader or a clown. While cheerleaders are nearly always paid in cash, *koyong* participate on the understanding that they will be given as much wine as they want.

There are three stated functions of *koyong* in dancing *palin*: to entertain the crowd, to protect the “captain” (*ñidol*) of each team, and to keep the playing field “clean”—free from witchcraft. Previously, *koyong* would arrive at the site of the game the night before it was to take place, and spend the entire night dancing and clowning around on the pitch in order to prevent any witches (*kalku*) from interfering with either goal. That the eight *koyong* were drawn from both patri-groups prevented any bias. The important thing

was that the *koyong* had to still be dancing at sunrise. Contemporary clowns do not spend the previous night on the pitch, but they are among the first to arrive, and they carry out a cursory inspection of the goals to detect anything untoward. Once this has been done, the clowns dedicate themselves to what they see as by far and away their most important function: to entertain.

As I have said, *koyong* are paid with unlimited drink, and so they often get very drunk, very quickly. They ride back and forth between the two patri-groups shouting insults at their *koyong* counterparts from the opposing group. They swing their wooden swords at each other, and occasionally at the spectators, all the while hurling comical abuse at everyone present. After the initial ceremonial encounter between the two patri-groups is over and the groups have broken up to engage in hospitality on an individual level, the *koyong* continue their antics, going from table to table, shouting abuse, groping women, and stealing meat and bread from people's plates. By this stage they are often struggling to stand up, crashing into each other, fighting, and generally creating mayhem. While some people scorn the behavior of contemporary *koyong*, most acknowledge that this drunken and chaotic behavior has always been a basic part of what *koyong* do. Through their chaotic antics, clowns delineate in negative form an implicit ethical code of sharing and respect through which the other ritual participants constitute themselves as true people (*che*). Although people show annoyance when food and wine are snatched from their plates, such transgressions do not spark violent confrontations as they would outside of the ritual context. And yet, although the ritual serves to isolate the clown from the consequence of his actions within it, it does not isolate him from being identified both within and outside of ritual as a clown. It is important to note that although *koyong* only appear in their fully masked form at dancing *palin*, the people who are identified as *koyong* act out similar behaviors at standard *palin*, albeit without mask and hobbyhorse. To reiterate, *koyong* is not simply a "performance" with a definite beginning and end, but rather a permanent state.

### *Koyong in Ngillatun*

It is hard to imagine how the role of *koyong* clowns in the great *ngillatun* fertility ritual could be any more starkly different from their role in dancing *palin*. While in the latter, the clowns embody mayhem, disorder, impropriety, and a drunken lack of self-control, in the *ngillatun* they are the literal enforcers of order, control, and rigid discipline. At its simplest, the *ngillatun* fertility ritual is a request to God (Ngenechen) for providence for the coming year and a giving of thanks for that received in the previous year.<sup>7</sup> The ritual is

<sup>7</sup> My account here is drawn entirely from previously published studies of *ngillatun* by Alonqueo 1979; Bacigalupo 2007; Casamiquela 1964; Dillehay 2007; Foerster 1993; Hassler 1979; and Pereda and Perrota 1994.

held alternately by two ritual congregations (*rewe*); each year one acts as hosts and the other as obligatory guests, with their roles reversed each year. The events of the *ngillatun* ritual itself are basically a series of parallel exchanges between hosts and guests, who then come together to act as one with regards to the deity, Ngenechen. An initial set of dancing, greeting, and sacrifice is offered to the *mütrüm*, “obligatory guests,” before hosts and guests together offer their dancing, greeting, and sacrifice to Ngenechen.

In many Mapuche communities throughout southern Chile the lines of male and female dancers, and the blocks of “guest” and “host” dancers that they comprise, are forcibly choreographed by masked *koyong* armed with heavy bamboo poles. Dancers who step out of line, fail to kneel for prayers at the appropriate moment, or do not remove their hats during prayers receive a sharp verbal reprimand from *koyong*, frequently accompanied by a heavy tap from their bamboo pole. The last thing one would want to do in the presence of a clown in a *ngillatun* ritual is to laugh. The ritual is carried out exclusively in the Mapuche language, Mapudungun, except that the clowns are referred to by Spanish term *sargento* (sergeant), which would seem to indicate both their association with white people and their connotations of hierarchy and coercion. In some communities, *koyong* in their masked form are restricted to either *palin* hockey or the *ngillatun* ritual. Around Lago Budi, masked *koyong* rarely take part in *ngillatun*, but I am nevertheless confident in asserting a continuity between these two forms of *koyong* even there, since the same individuals who play *koyong* in *palin* hockey frequently take on the role of “sergeants” in the *ngillatun* ritual, albeit in unmasked form.

#### MAPUCHE CLOWNS FROM A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

This juxtaposition of clowns as simultaneously the forces of chaos in the game of *palin* and the enforcers of the social order in the context of the *ngillatun* fertility ritual, as both revolutionary and reactionary, seems at first sight bizarre, yet this strange duality of ritual roles is one of the most widespread features of indigenous ritual clowns in the Americas.<sup>8</sup> As Robert Brightman noted among the Northwestern Maidu of California, “The clown exhibited paradoxical characteristics, transgressing in delimited ritual frames against the authority and official morality of which he was otherwise the personification in both ritual and secular contexts” (1999: 277). Julian Steward observed more generally that the indigenous clown, or “ceremonial buffoon” as he likes to call him, “is seldom purely a comedian” (1931: 190). We find what appears to be a

<sup>8</sup> The strange duality of clown’s ritual roles, what Handelman calls “this unity of fluff and gravity,” occurs throughout the world (1998: 234). The fundamental question of why such ludic behavior is so frequently central to ritual is beyond the scope of this essay. My purpose here is to use clowning to illuminate relations of alterity rather than to fully explore its ritual potency. For approaches to the latter, see Babcock 1984; Bakhtin 1965; Charles 1945; Honigmann 1942; Makarius 1970; and Mitchell 1992.

similar pattern among the Gê-speaking Kanela of central Brazil, among whom the clown society is in certain contexts purely comical, but in others an essential part of sacred ritual practice and indistinguishable from other Kanela ritual societies (Nimuendaju and Lowie 1937; Crocker 1990). Likewise, during the *koko* naming ceremony among the Kayapo of central Brazil, ludic clowns serve the serious function of “activating” the sacred anteater masks (Turner 1997).

A second feature of Mapuche ritual clowns is equally widespread throughout the Americas: their association with ethnic others, and more specifically, with “white people.” Steward describes indigenous clowning as a “burlesque of strangers” (1931: 196), and ritual clowns frequently parody white people in North America, among the Apache, Hopi, Tewa, and Navajo of the Southwest, the Winnebago and Iroquois to the east, and the Kwakiutl of the Pacific Northwest (*ibid.*). Rodríguez describes how, in Taos pueblo, people employ real white people from neighboring communities to play the role of their ritual clowns, known as *abuelos* (1991: 242). In South America, too, clowns or clown-like ludic roles in Waiwai (Howard 1993), Krahô (Morim de Lima n.d.), Kaxinawa (Lagrou 2006), and many other societies are frequently associated with ethnic others, and white people in particular.

A third feature of ritual clowns that seems to be equally widespread through the Americas is an insatiability of their bodily desires, for both sex and food. As the Maidu clown says to the shaman, “You came to dance. I came to eat and gamble” (in Brightman 1999: 275). Through both stealing food and inappropriate sexual behavior, ritual clowns bypass proper social relationships of kinship in fulfilling their bodily desires. Both stealing food and inappropriate sexual behavior can in fact be understood as explicit denials of the mutual interdependence of bodily desires that, as Peter Gow (1989) has shown, forms the very heart of indigenous sociality—the clowns’ actions express both material and social impoverishment. The absence of social relationships through which to fulfill these desires is linked to a fourth characteristic of indigenous ritual clowns that is found throughout the Americas: their abject poverty (Steward 1931: 195).

As far as I am aware, these four fundamental features of indigenous ritual clowns—their dual ritual roles, their association with white people, their uncontrolled bodily desires, and their abject poverty—have never been brought into dialogue, and that is one of the things I want to do in this essay. I think that although these features of ritual clowning might not all be present in every case, we can nevertheless trace an underlying logic that connects them.<sup>9</sup> We have seen how in the context of dancing *palin* clowns act in

<sup>9</sup> One reason these widespread features of indigenous ritual clowns have not been systematically linked is that the anthropological study of ritual clowns, and not just in the Americas, has been rooted in an analytical paradigm focused on clowning as “subversive” and on the duality of

an utterly chaotic manner, getting drunk, abusing people, fighting, and stealing food and wine. By contrast, in the *ngillatun* fertility ritual they enforce absolute submission to rigidly organized collective dances and prayers. At first glance, their activities in games of *palin* appear to be anti-social or inversionary, and their activities in *ngillatun* rituals social and conservative, or even reactionary. From a Mapuche perspective, though, both sets of behaviors are equally flawed and equally distant from the proper behavior of a “true person.” Perhaps the most important trait to understanding Mapuche as a moral category, as that of a “true person,” is the careful balance of respecting others while still asserting personal autonomy.<sup>10</sup> Respect (*yewen*) takes the form of always greeting, sharing, and reciprocating hospitality. It also involves never seeking to assert authority over others, never issuing a command or order. It is obvious why clown behaviors in games of *palin*—stealing food, abusing women, and hurling insults—might be interpreted as disrespectful. But Mapuche people also understand their behavior in the *ngillatun* ritual as in some ways lacking respect (*yewelay*), though they might appear to an observer to be enforcing the “social.” The very idea of commanding another person and threatening them with a big stick in any context other than a *ngillatun* ritual would fill most Mapuche people with horror for its blatant lack of respect.

From the standpoint of a rural Mapuche “aesthetics of conviviality” (Overing and Passes 2000), clowns’ behavior is not as dualistic as it might at first appear. In both games of *palin* and *ngillatun* rituals, clowns push the outer boundaries of what constitutes socially acceptable behavior, but they cannot be reduced to the “anti social,” to the role of subversion and inversion characteristic of anthropological accounts of clowning. Witches, *kalku*, do perform this role, and they do so through a very precise inversion of everyday sociality. Witches replace the exchanges of wine that constitute positive sociality with exchanges of poison. What we could call the “social”—the everyday ethics of Mapuche life—and the “anti-social”—witchcraft—necessarily take place within the same moral grammar, with the latter simply inverting the forms of the former. Clowns, however, are at right angles to such an opposition, or perhaps on a different plane altogether. They seem to be so completely ignorant of social conventions as to be incapable of inverting them: they simply steal, fight, shout, and so on. Much the same can be said of white people, with whom clowns are so closely associated. Mapuche people frequently lament the fact that *winka* do not know how to be respectful. They frequently fail to greet properly, to share, or be hospitable, and worst of all, they try and tell other people

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ritual roles as a particular point of access to clowns’ subversive potential; accounts have concentrated on this duality at the expense of clowns’ other features.

<sup>10</sup> The careful balancing of respect and autonomy is discussed at length in Chihuailaf 1999; and Course 2011.

what to do. From a Mapuche perspective, white people, like clowns, are forced to circumvent proper social relations in the satisfaction of their desires, living in poverty “just like orphans” (*kuñifal reke*), as my *comadre* María told me.

In this section I have explained how, at least in the Mapuche case and probably beyond, certain features of ritual clowns—their dual ritual roles and their association with white people—are not coincidental, but rather are systematically linked to their ambiguous location beyond any moral grammar of the social and the anti-social. Further features of clowns, such as their uncontrolled bodily desires and their poverty, have moral implications of their abject status and locate them beyond the bounds of “true personhood” (see Kristeva 1982). In what follows, I ask how and why, despite the striking similarities between indigenous clowns throughout the Americas, the economies of alterity in which clowns are embedded can dramatically redraw the values of these ludic roles. To ask the question another way: under what conditions is clowning transformed from a critique of others into self-critique?

#### CLOWNS AND THE CONTROL OF DIFFERENCE

It is my contention in this essay that the context of engagement with alterity determines the nature of the ludic portrayal of others, and furthermore, that the status of those occupying these roles serves as a telling analytical index of this context. The collapse of an economy of alterity makes the “framing” of ludic portrayals of others impossible, and the ludic embodiment of others is relegated to marginal, low status people. To make this argument we must step beyond the bounds of Mapuche ethnography and turn briefly to accounts of the ludic portrayals of others among indigenous peoples elsewhere in the Americas.

Let us start with Keith Basso’s classic account of ludic portrayals of white people among the Western Apache (1979).<sup>11</sup> At the time of Basso’s initial research in the 1960s, the boundaries between Apache and white seemed more or less impermeable. All Apache spoke Apache as a first language, and all were convinced from an early age of the superiority of the Apache way of doing things. Although Apache society was threatened economically and politically, it seemed resilient in terms of Apaches’ understandings of themselves as Apache. While Apache sought to engage with whites in terms of medical provision and the acquisition of trade goods, the forms of this engagement appear from Basso’s account to have been largely under Apache control. The boundary between white and Apache was maintained through ludic portrayals of whites in which senior men would comically berate others in the manner of a white person. Such portrayals focused on stereotypical white behaviors that contradicted and contrasted with Apache ways of doing things. Basso

<sup>11</sup> Although Basso is talking of casual ludic portrayals rather than ritual clowns, he makes explicit the connection between *libayé* ritual clowns and ludic portrayals of whites (1979: 108).



writes, “The image the joker presents of ‘the Whiteman’ is an image of ineffectively guided behavior, of social action gone haywire, of an individual stunningly ignorant of how to comport himself appropriately in public situations” (ibid.: 48). According to Basso, “‘the Whiteman’ is the symbol of what ‘the Apache’ is not” (ibid.: 64).<sup>12</sup>

At the time of Basso’s research, “white” and “Apache” were clearly demarcated and opposed categories, and ludic portrayals of whites served to emphasize the superiority of Apaches. It is central to my argument here that the only people to attempt such ludic portrayals were highly respected senior men, the highest status members of Apache society. Here, the person occupying the ludic role is so clearly a person fully in control of any engagement with difference that his portrayal of a “white” can be nothing more than that: a portrayal or a representation. Yet one thing Basso’s informants insisted upon was the “danger” of portraying whites: “Jokes involving imitations of Anglo-Americans are said to be among the most dangerous of all” (ibid.: 43). The explanation Basso proffers for this stated danger is that one risks offending the person at whom the clumsy, rude parody is directed. But reading between the lines of his ethnography reveals another, obscured possibility: that one is always at risk of becoming white, that the boundary between Apache and white is not as impermeable as it might at first seem. As an Apache father tells his son (ibid.: 31), “Don’t be like white people. Don’t even joke. It’s no good. Leave it alone!” Even more telling is the epigraph to one of Basso’s chapters, by the Apache poet David Martinez: “You must listen to old men // Not quite capable of becoming white men” (ibid.: 67). One wonders if now, fifty years later, it is still the most respected elements of Apache society who imitate whites? One suspects that amid deep-rooted concerns about the loss of Apache language and culture among younger generations (Nevins 2013), the joke may have come too close to the bone.

A further example of the ludic portrayal of ethnic others comes from Catherine Howard’s ethnography of *pawana*, “the farce of the visitors,” carried out by the Waiwai in Guyanese Amazonia (1993). *Pawana* refers to a ritualized ludic performance in which members of a Waiwai village act as “visitors” from ethnically distinct groups, either “savage” indigenous groups or equally “savage” whites. As Howard puts it, “The caricature plays with contrasting identities between the Waiwai and groups which are radically ‘Other’” (ibid.: 237). The “visitors” embody some of the classic tropes of indigenous clowning: they exemplify uncontrolled sexual behavior, they fail to recognize “real people’s” food despite their hunger, and their ragged costumes pulled from the trash show their poverty. In short, they reject all of the carefully balanced exchange relationships that form the core of Waiwai society. Howard

<sup>12</sup> See Bashkow 2006, for an account of the “whiteman” as an image of what the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea are not.

observes, "The 'visitors' take themselves seriously, but reveal themselves to be fundamentally ignorant, disorderly, and incompletely socialized" (ibid.: 242). Although any Waiwai may play the roles of "visitors," what is essential is that their identities be reversed. Hence men play women, the young play the old, and so forth. Such reversals distance or frame each person from the character of the "visitor" being performed.<sup>13</sup>

In line with my analyses of the Mapuche and Apache cases, let us consider the Waiwai "farce of the visitors" within the context of the economy of alterity in which it is embedded. The Waiwai form a central link in an extensive trading network that has for many centuries encompassed the majority of the Guianas. Howard writes, "This trading network has been operating for at least two centuries; it was supplemented, but not substituted, by exchange with missionaries, colonists, and governmental indigenous agencies in the several countries which the network encompassed" (ibid.: 236). The Waiwai form a crucial link between whites and isolated indigenous peoples: "The Waiwai see themselves as mediators between two categories of radically opposed non-Waiwai, both considered to be somewhat deficient beings, but nevertheless capable of being socialized and transformed into decent Waiwai" (ibid.: 235). So, unlike many rural Mapuche who see themselves as subject to an uncontrolled transformation into the Other, Waiwai understand themselves to be in the business of a controlled transformation of Others. This controlled engagement with Others is highlighted by the fact that any respectable Waiwai person may take on the role of a "visitor," safe in the knowledge that their ludic antics are framed apart from their everyday personae. Howard argues that the *pawana* ritual "brings about the expansion of the frontiers of 'Waiwai' identity, thereby confirming the power of their culture as a conjunction of principles of transformation" (ibid.: 241).<sup>14</sup> My argument is precisely that once control of the economy of alterity has been lost, then the possibility of successfully "framing" ludic performances of Others is also lost, and such ludic roles are delegated to the most marginal people in society.<sup>15</sup> I turn now to expand on

<sup>13</sup> A further counterexample is that of the masked *mosko* dancers among the Miskitu of Nicaragua, described by Jamieson (2001). These dancers, who are also strongly associated with white people, are drawn from those in the prime of Miskitu youth. Yet in contemporary Miskitu society, the white others whom these masked dancers represent are North American and Caribbean traders, idealized affines whose connotations are highly positive in contrast to the Mapuche case in which white people are generally evaluated in negative moral terms.

<sup>14</sup> Even in the Waiwai case we can see how the outcome of such ludic performance may express changes in the relation with Others. Howard writes, "Eventually the caricature became reflexive: one time a 'visitor' claimed to be 'Waiwai' and the subsequent confusion generated various games of double meaning" (1993: 253).

<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, surviving sources do not tell us the social status of Mapuche clowns prior to the military defeat of 1883. The argument I advance in this essay would predict that the clown role was not in the past confined to the most marginal people as it is today.

the form that the collapse of this symbolic economy of alterity has taken in the Mapuche context.

#### MAPUCHE AND *WINKA*

What does it mean to be Mapuche? Not surprisingly, there is no unitary answer to this question. On one hand, Mapuche appears as an essentialized “ethnic” identity fixed at birth, while on the other, Mapuche is a fluid and transformational category of becoming.<sup>16</sup> In some instances people attribute Mapuche identity on the basis of having two Mapuche parents, speaking Mapudungun, and “looking Mapuche.” Children of one Mapuche and one *winka* parent are referred to as *champurriado*, a transitional category that lasts for just one generation; there is no “mestizo” category as in other parts of Latin America.<sup>17</sup> Yet the same people who define being Mapuche in these essentialized terms of genealogy, language, and phenotype will equally attribute the status of Mapuche to somebody who neither appears indigenous nor speaks Mapudungun if that person has been raised in a Mapuche community, has worked, lived, and eaten with Mapuche people, and, most importantly, behaves with respect in the manner of a “true person.” Here we are closer to the indigenous understanding of inherently transformational identities established through commensality, conviviality, and shared perspective, which result from and lead to a shared morality (Overing and Passes 2000; Vilaça 2005; Londoño Sulkin 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1998). While, depending on the context, rural people may draw pragmatically on both essentialized and transformational understandings to attribute or deny the status of Mapuche, of “true personhood,” it is always inextricable from moral comportment. Mapuche people’s respect for others—through proper greeting, sharing, hospitality, and the avoidance of coercion—is simultaneously an ontological and moral state.

The moral value attached to being Mapuche does not signify that white people are simply relegated to either the “immoral” or the “anti-social.” I mentioned earlier that relations with *winka* are, in certain contexts, greatly desired. Contemporary patronyms such as Colihuinca (*kelü winka*, literally “red-haired white person”) and Curruhinca (*kurü winka*, “black white person”) testify to the continuing salience of ethnic others (Boccara 2007; Foerster and Menard 2009). Furthermore, people’s primary motivation in sending their children to school is so that they will learn to function in a *winka* world. A key point is that the desirability of engagement with *winka*, and the cooption of their

<sup>16</sup> The coexistence of seemingly contradictory discourses of identity, what Bauman calls “dual discursive competence,” is widespread (1996). See Rosengren (2003) for an account of such dual constructions of identity among the Matsigenka of Peruvian Amazonia.

<sup>17</sup> The shifting historical nature of the “mestizo” category has been a major topic of research elsewhere in Latin America. For important discussions of political and historical shifts in mestizo and indigenous identities, see de la Cadena 2000; 2005; Canessa 2006; 2012; Goodale 2006; Lazar 2008; Wade 1997; Weismantel 2001; and Wright 1993.

sources of value both material and symbolic, should not be confused with a desire to become *winka*. For the Mapuche, and indeed for indigenous peoples throughout South America, any engagement with difference must always be balanced. A key theme in such engagements is therefore the reversibility of any transformative encounter with white people. For example, the Panará of central Brazil dress and act as whites when entering white society, but once back in their villages they reverse this transformation by reverting to Panará ways (Ewart 2007). Likewise, the young Yanesha woman described by Santos Granero becomes white upon moving to the city, and then returns to being Yanesha after a few months back in her natal community (2009).

One local way of understanding what constitutes the “ideal” balance of difference in the Mapuche context is through two evaluative adjectives distinctive to Mapuche Spanish: *awinkado* (to become too *winka*) and *mapuchado* (to become too Mapuche). People said to be more *mapuchado* speak little Spanish, are obsessed with witchcraft accusations, and are poor even by local standards. Those who are less *mapuchado* speak good Spanish, are less concerned about the threat of witchcraft, and are usually more economically stable. This sliding classification is crosscut by that of being *awinkado*—heavily influenced by white Chilean society. Being more *awinkado* does not necessarily correspond to being less *mapuchado*. Many of those who hold roles as guardians of Mapuche traditions and values, such as *lonko* headmen or *ngenpin* ritual organizers, would not be described as *mapuchado* since they can speak good Spanish, do not exaggerate the threat of witchcraft, and are prosperous (Course 2012). In other words, to be properly Mapuche is to be neither *mapuchado*, “too Mapuche,” nor *awinkado*, “too white,” but instead to maintain a careful balance between the two. Yet for reasons to which I now turn, this balanced engagement with difference is no longer possible for many Mapuche.

By the early twentieth century, the Mapuche population, which had survived military defeat in 1883, had outgrown the limited land allotted to it under land titles.<sup>18</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, this land shortage, coupled with a rapidly growing population, became so acute that many Mapuche people had little choice but to migrate to Chile’s urban centers, sometimes the regional centers of Temuco and Concepcion (Aravena, Gissi, and Toledo 2005) but more often the capital Santiago (Antileo 2010; Gissi 2001; 2002; Kilaleo 2004). Of the Chilean Mapuche population of about one million, it is estimated that over half a million now live in Santiago.<sup>19</sup> Young rural

<sup>18</sup> For historical accounts of this process, see Bengoa 1999, and Mallon 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Mapuche census figures have been controversial. The census of 1992 counted 928,079 Mapuche people, and the 2002 census 604,349; that is, 323,730 Mapuche people “disappeared” despite Mapuche having the highest birthrate of any sector of the Chilean population. This seems to have resulted from a rewording of the census questions. People in the south frequently refer to the disappearance as “statistical genocide,” and Mapuche historian José Ancán called it

Mapuche realize from an early age that such a move is often inevitable. If one's family owns just one or two hectares, it cannot support seven or eight adult children and their families. In most cases all but one of a family's children are upon reaching adulthood forced to leave the Mapuche heartland of the rural south. Many young Mapuche people I know are, not surprisingly, excited about moving to the big city, possibilities of economic and romantic success, and freedom from parental constraints. However, while the allure of the city tends to diminish with time, the factors preventing people's return to the rural south do not. There remains a deep sadness among many young people with whom I spoke because they are unlikely to ever be able to return south except for fleeting visits.

So, what becomes of Mapuche people in Santiago?<sup>20</sup> Much important work has been written about the urban Mapuche organizations that hold *ngilatun* rituals, organize games of *palin*, and stage marches against the oppression of Mapuche communities in the south (Ancán 2005; Antileo 2010; Gissi 2001; 2002; Kilaleo 2004; see also Warren and Jackson 2003). Yet these authors see that only a minority of Santiago's Mapuche residents take part in these activities. As Enrique Antileo writes about Santiago, "Our research was always concerned with experiences of Mapuche involved in associations, but it is recognized that their number is extremely low in comparison to the non-organized Mapuche world." He goes on to ask, "What happens to this [non-participating] section of the Mapuche diaspora" (2010: 80)? There are of course multiple answers to this question reflecting the multiple ways of being Mapuche in the twenty-first century. Claudia Briones has detailed tensions between those Mapuche in Argentina who seek to return to a purified culture, and Mapuche who embrace new cultural forms from a distinctly Mapuche perspective, such as those involved in the punk (*Mapupunky*) and heavy metal (*Mapuheavy*) scenes (2007).<sup>21</sup> But again, participants in these movements in the Chilean context constitute a relatively small proportion of those Mapuche who reside in Santiago. A short answer to Antileo's question is that many of the non-organized segments of the Mapuche diaspora simply become part of Santiago's working classes. Or to phrase it in the terms of rural Mapuche who remain in the south, the urban migrants have, quite literally,

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"demographic cannibalism" (2005). The International Red Cross estimates the total Mapuche population in Chile to be 1.2 million, of whom six hundred thousand live in Santiago (Marquéz 2006).

<sup>20</sup> My understandings of the urban Mapuche experience come from a total of six months living with different Mapuche families in Santiago over the course of the past fifteen years. All of the Mapuche I know in Santiago live in working class districts; the women all work as domestic maids, and the men either in factories or bakeries. The "becoming white" of urban migrants described in this paper is of course a gradual process, and from a rural perspective it is those who have been in Santiago the longest who have moved furthest away from being true "Mapuche."

<sup>21</sup> The rise of Mapuche hip-hop has been prominent: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19178556> (accessed 27 June 2013).

become white.<sup>22</sup> They are spread throughout the city rather than in specific districts, they frequently marry white people, and work in their homes. They no longer speak Mapudungun, their trips to their natal communities in the south become less and less frequent, and perhaps most tellingly, they no longer refer to themselves as Mapuche but rather as *sureños*, “southerners.” In his discussion of the transformational nature of indigenous cosmologies, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has pointed out that for the jaguar shaman who successfully transforms into a jaguar, the term “jaguar” becomes meaningless, for this is exactly what he has become: “As soon as the human turns into a jaguar, the jaguar is no longer there” (2007: 16). In a similar fashion, for the many urban Mapuche who become *winka*, the very notion of *winka* ceases to be meaningful since this is now the very position from which their perspective emerges. Although in the south rural Mapuche people’s conversation is peppered with references to *winka* and their strange ways, the term *winka* is rarely if ever used by these same people once they become established, long-term residents of Santiago.<sup>23</sup>

The way in which this process of massive urban migration and resulting shifts in identity is conceptualized in rural Mapuche communities provides the context in which ritual clowns must be understood. Recall that despite their radically different forms of comportment in *palin* hockey and in *ngillatun* fertility rituals, in both cases clowns failed to act as proper Mapuche people because they lacked respect. This same accusation of lacking respect (*yewelay*) is frequently leveled at those long-term Santiago residents who make occasional trips back to their communities. They are accused of bossing people around, demanding wine and food without reciprocating, failing to be generous with their wealth, and refusing to speak Mapudungun. In short, from the perspective of rural people, they have ceased to be Mapuche in a morally meaningful way, firmly ensconced as they are in the ways of white people. In some cases they themselves acknowledge their transformation. At a funeral in my fieldsite of Piedra Alta I met an elderly man who had lived in the city of Concepción for over fifty years, who told me, “I used to be Mapuche, but that was a long time ago.”

“Acculturation” is a dirty word in the contemporary anthropology of lowland South America, first because it negates indigenous agency in effecting

<sup>22</sup> In iterating this discourse I am neither critiquing nor questioning the validity of the multiplicity of new forms of Mapuche identity. As I have written elsewhere, a Mapuche identity premised on ethnicity is probably a prerequisite for an effective Mapuche political voice (2010). My goal here is simply to assert that a rural understanding of Mapuche identity as a contingent moral state should be taken seriously.

<sup>23</sup> This position is not unique to rural Mapuche. As Canessa writes for Aymara-speaking villagers in Pocobaya in Bolivia, “Pocobayaños do not feel they share an identity with urban people, whether or not they identify themselves as indigenous. That is, the 50 percent of indigenous people who lead urban lives are not considered by rural people such as those in Pocobaya to be indigenous at all” (2006: 259).



particular transformations, and second since it implies a transformation of a unidirectional and irreversible nature.<sup>24</sup> The critics of acculturation theory are surely right in identifying long-term patterns of willed transformation and agency where they have been previously overlooked or obscured, and in highlighting the frequent reversibility of indigenous transformations (Gow 2007b; Santos Granero 2009; Vilaça 2007). But this is not to say that there is no room for an understanding of “acculturation” within indigenous logics (Gow in Amaroso and Mahalem de Lima 2011). Indeed, this is exactly how many rural Mapuche left behind in the south, with little option other than to watch their children move to the city without possibility of return, come to understand their situation. Given the deictic grounding of Mapuche and other indigenous cosmologies (Viveiros de Castro 1998), acculturation is necessarily something that happens to other people. It is only those who understand themselves as remaining Mapuche who can lament the *awinkamiento*, the “white-becoming,” of others. Following Gow’s interrogation of the term “ex-Cocama” (2007b), we can see that while a concept of “ex-Mapuche” would be meaningless to “ex-Mapuche” themselves, it remains a bitter reality to those left behind.

In their desire to counter stereotypical accounts of indigenous peoples as passive recipients of externally induced transformations, anthropologists have sought to reinterpret such transformations as revealing of indigenous agency.<sup>25</sup> As Santos Granero rightly puts it, “Cultural change is not only the consequence of external pressures or coercive socioeconomic structures but also the result of a conscious indigenous attempt to incorporate the Other into their sphere of social relations” (2009: 479). The anthropologist’s task, he asserts, is “to restore a sense of native historical agency” (*ibid.*). I fully agree, but it seems to me that in their desire to restore agency anthropologists must be cautious not to preclude the very possibility of an indigenous concept of failure, specifically the failure to balance difference in the face of the realities of forced and irreversible transformation. We must not overlook the salience and poignancy of indigenous self-critique or indigenous discourses about precisely their own lack of historical agency. By attributing agency where there is none, anthropologists can deny indigenous peoples the very possibility of defeat and failure that makes them human. Instead, we need to be open to the creative, perceptive, and even empowering ways in which people come to understand their own lack

<sup>24</sup> A third factor is that the concept seems to suggest that, in opposition to acculturated peoples, there exist peoples living in a pristine, uncontacted, and uncontaminated state, and that these societies should be the true locus of anthropological interest (see Povinelli 2002; Trouillot 1991). As Whitten and Whitten point out, “The reason the word [acculturation] is ‘awful’ is that it is applied by professionals, who should know better, to dismiss the sort of data generated by serious ethnography and history” (2008: 251).

<sup>25</sup> What actually constitutes “agency” from an indigenous perspective is a complex issue and beyond the scope of this essay. For the purposes of my argument here, I follow Santos Granero in understanding “agency” as the capacity to act within and against larger forces (2009: 479).

of agency. If we take analyzing all phenomena as examples of indigenous agency to be an *a priori* concern, then we will fail to be open to how indigenous peoples might come to terms with their own perceived powerlessness in the face of colonialism, with their own sense of failure and decline. As it stands, there is a lacuna in the anthropological literature on indigenous South America and in anthropology generally concerning failure and decline.<sup>26</sup> This essay is an attempt to engage with an indigenous experience of perceived failure and decline from within, without reducing it to tired tropes of hegemony and acculturation.

I have given some idea of the ways in which rural Mapuche people understand what it means to be Mapuche and what it means to have become *winka*. While such understandings differ between young and old, and men and women, the concern with shifting moral identity is the axis on which these differences turn. Thus, while there are disagreements over whether it is men or women who are most prone to “become white,” both men and women agree that “becoming white” bears a negative moral evaluation. More generally, I have shown that becoming *winka* is not something strange or esoteric, but rather what actually happens to many Mapuche people, perhaps the majority of the younger generation. This becoming white is premised on an understanding of identity as necessarily transformational, a process of becoming evoked through conviviality, commensality, and the sharing of a moral perspective. Such an understanding of transformational identity is now solidly within the mainstream of Americanist anthropology. Where the becoming white of Mapuche migration differs is that it is far from being the result of willed indigenous agency, from being yet another example of an “openness to the Other,” it has been imposed by a structure of colonial domination that has destabilized the symbolic economy of alterity. I strongly suspect that this is also the case for many other indigenous peoples. Vilaça describes the Wari attitude toward whiteness as a desire to experience difference while simultaneously preserving that difference (2007: 188). But despite the vibrancy of indigenous resistance in many parts of the Americas, the history of the continent has in many ways been a story of failures to preserve this difference, of the loss of control of the symbolic economy of alterity.

Given the politics of representation currently in play, it is no surprise that indigenous accounts of this process have been largely ignored or underplayed in the contemporary anthropology of lowland South America.<sup>27</sup> I am

<sup>26</sup> The dominant desire to locate and attribute agency has been a central part of the anthropological project for a very long time. See Keane 2003, for an account of its genealogy. A recent exception to this trend in South Americanist anthropology has been a dossier of papers addressing the intersections of non-indigenous and indigenous discourses of loss in Amazonia (Ball 2012; Cepek 2012; Espinosa 2012; Viatori 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Close readings of certain ethnographies do reveal such moments. See, for example, Hugh-Jones’s accounts of Barasana myths, which posit indigenous failings as the origin of white domination (1988; 1989).

sympathetic to anthropologists' critiques of acculturation theory, and I am certainly not arguing for a return to a paradigm in which external global forces shape passive indigenous lives. But I do contend that any attempt to take indigenous understandings seriously cannot be limited to those cases where indigenous agency in balancing sameness and difference wins out. As I have argued elsewhere, rural people's understanding of Mapuche as a contingent moral rather than "ethnic" category is intrinsically limiting when it comes to the politics of recognition demanded by both national and international actors (Course 2010; see Povinelli 2002).

Neither has my purpose been to argue against the legitimacy of the many new ways of being Mapuche emerging in both urban and rural areas. I simply want to create a conceptual space in which rural narratives about "becoming white" are not dismissed as the iteration of state ideologies or "false consciousness" but are instead taken seriously as profound statements about morality, agency, and power.

I want to finish by turning to moral and emotional readings given by Mapuche people of such a failure, of the irreversible "becoming white" of so many people, this intrinsic transformational capacity to become *winka*. To do so I return to the clowns, taking them to be an instance of what Wagner (1981) calls "reverse anthropology," a Mapuche account of this transformative capacity to become white, to become *winka*. Throughout this essay I have argued for the importance of extending the analysis of ritual clowns beyond their ritual performances. One reason for this is that, as I have described, the identity of clowns, their status as *koyong*, is not confined to their ritual actions. Being a clown is a permanent state that moves through intense ritual and also less intense everyday periods. While in their ritual performances clowns have become "too white" (*awinkado*), in their everyday lives they are "too Mapuche" (*mapuchado*), drawn as they are from the most marginal sections of Mapuche society. In both cases, they stand for the failure to control and balance the requisite engagement with white Others, a quality that goes hand in hand with the proper moral comportment of a "true person" (*che*). Thus their ritual antics can only be understood in terms of the perceived misery and inevitable tragedy of their everyday lives.

The encompassment by *koyong* of two opposed or contradictory principles, of their being "too white" in ritual and "too Mapuche" in their everyday lives, corresponds to Handelman's general account of the clown, in which "the clown type combines, subsumes, and decomposes unlike attributes in its composition—and therefore remains in-between all of them" (1998: 241). Whereas the "true person" is able to achieve just the right balance of Mapuche and *winka*, of sameness and difference, the clown "moves between alternative realities without solving these paradoxes of transition" (ibid.: 243). It is precisely their unbalanced encompassment of opposed states, this internal oscillation, which, according to Handelman, leads to clowns "being in motion, but

unfinished and incomplete” (ibid.). Mapuche clowns, then, are truly abject, permanent embodiments of the implications of unbalanced and uncontrolled engagement with difference. Rather than a representation, they are, in both ritual and everyday contexts, a particular state of becoming, frozen and framed as a state of being.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have suggested that a fundamentally similar conjunction of features across ludic roles—dual ritual function, uncontrolled bodily desires, poverty, and an association with ethnic others—derives its meaning in each given case by the economy of alterity as locally constituted. In those situations where the balancing of Self and Other remains under control, then clowns serve as a means of portraying those Others, frequently in negative terms, and thus strengthening the boundary of the clown’s own group. Yet in cases such as the Mapuche, where this balance of Self and Other is no longer tenable, clowns take on a different meaning, revealing precisely the collapse of boundaries between Self and Other, indigenous and white. Such readings cannot be constructed through analysis of ritual alone, but have to take into account the status of those who portray clowns. Where clowns reinforce boundaries of alterity, they are drawn from the more prestigious sections of society; where clowning instantiates the collapse of such boundaries, they are drawn from the most marginal sections. The non-ritual identity of clowns casts their presentation of ethnic boundaries in a moral light.

This moral reading of clowns indexed by their low social status outside of ritual places both clowns and white people outside the boundaries of the social, yet does not reduce them to the anti-social. Through locating this juxtaposition of clowns and white peoples in the context of the forced migration of almost an entire generation to Chile’s urban centers, we can understand rural Mapuche people’s provocative claim that urban migrants have “become white.” From the perspective of those left behind, the migrants no longer appear as Mapuche due to their perceived failure to properly greet, share, and respect in the manner of “true people.” It is this inherent capacity of Mapuche people to become white, rather than white people themselves, which I suggest is at the heart of Mapuche clowning. It is the identity of clowns as persons from the margins of Mapuche society, as those who are most *mapuchado*, which casts this becoming white in a tragic and negative light. Through their lived embodiment of the failure to balance the engagement with difference, clowns instantiate this process of transformation, a transformation neither willed nor desired, but imposed by the exigencies of their position at the margins of Chilean colonialism. Rather than marking out indigenous agency in the face of global pressures, *koyong* clowns mark a creative response to the very absence of agency.

Through the abjection of clowns, Mapuche people's transformative capacity to become white—the fate of most young people—is held at arm's length, and made the object of speculation, ridicule, moral evaluation, and bitter tragedy. Like Clastres' ideal Indian chief (1987 [1974]), the Mapuche clown stands marginalized as the living embodiment of other ways of being in the world, ways that threaten constantly to overwhelm. Once this transformation into another way of being, into a white person, has occurred, it becomes meaningless, or “obviated,” in Wagner's term (1978). Just as the jaguar-shaman looks back and sees his former kin as peccaries, when these “ex-Mapuche” look back to the rural south they no longer see “true people,” just “Indians” toiling in the mud. White people might be laughable, but as Mapuche experience testifies, they tend to get the last laugh.

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**Abstract:** This essay takes the antics of ritual clowns, *koyong*, as an entry point into the ways in which rural Mapuche people in southern Chile come to understand and reflect upon the inevitability of urban migration and the “becoming white” which this migration is said to imply. Utilizing both my own ethnographic data and comparative data from elsewhere in the Americas, I explore the striking continuities in the associations of indigenous ritual clowns: associations with poverty, with uncontrolled bodily desires, with dual ritual performances, and perhaps most significantly, with white people. I suggest that the moral indictment of the “becoming white” instantiated by clowns in their ritual performances emerges from their identities as people who in everyday life are denigrated as “too Mapuche.” Thus, far from being yet another example of indigenous people’s “agency” in mimetically co-opting the vitality of white others, I suggest that clowns are one of the means by which rural Mapuche people come to understand precisely their own *lack* of agency in the face of Chilean colonialism